



Department of Justice

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AIRPORT EMPLOYEE PLEADS GUILTY TO DRUG CONSPIRACY AND WEAPONS CHARGE

Orlando, Florida - Zabdiel J. Santiago Balaguer, a 22-year-old resident of Kissimmee, pled guilty yesterday to conspiracy to possess with the intent to distribute 5 kilograms or more of cocaine hydrochloride and marijuana, and carrying a firearm during and in relation to a drug trafficking offense. Balaguer faces a mandatory minimum penalty of 15 years' imprisonment up to life imprisonment and a \$4 million fine.

According to the plea agreement, in January 2007, FBI agents, working with Metropolitan Bureau of Investigation (MBI) agents, used a confidential source to introduce an undercover agent (UC) to Balaguer. Balaguer and his cocaine source of supply, Jose Pena Maldonado, also known as "Cuello," met the UC in Miami, at the Super Bowl and discussed shipping guns and marijuana to Puerto Rico and obtaining 50 kilograms of cocaine from Puerto Rico.

On March 5, 2007, Thomas Anthony Munoz was arrested when he deplaned in Puerto Rico from a flight that had left the Orlando International Airport. Munoz was arrested because he was carrying 14 firearms and 8 pounds of marijuana inside the passenger compartment of the aircraft. Balaguer sent Munoz with the contraband to Jose Pena Maldonado.

On March 6, 2007, the UC made a recorded telephone call to Balaguer. The UC

told Balaguer that he/she had watched the news and learned about an arrest of an airline employee, Thomas Anthony Munoz, in Puerto Rico, who smuggled several firearms and marijuana aboard a commercial flight that departed from Orlando on March 6, 2007. Balaguer told the UC that security at the airport had removed him from the airplane before it took off. Security released Balaguer from the scene because they could not find any weapons or drugs on him or his belongings. Balaguer was arrested later that evening.

The case was investigated by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Metropolitan Bureau of Investigation, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms & Explosives, and other federal and state law enforcement agencies. The case was prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Vincent A. Citro.